Identifying transgender health-related content in health sciences curricula

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Teaching transgender health

- We are calling for better transgender health care, yet our health care providers are not educated
- Education opportunities: in health professions education (medical/ nursing school) and continuous professional development courses
- SA health professions curricula do not include transgender health
- Little is known internationally about pedagogical approaches

Teaching sexual and gender identity

- Health professions students do not learn about sexual and gender diversity
- Positivist approach, biology dominates
- Hardly any space for social constructivist theories of gender
- No space to challenge their own attitudes/ prejudices towards transgender/ non-heteronormative people

The need

- Stevens (2012): transgender people experience discrimination and transphobia at the hands of health care providers
- International evidence of health care providers' normative and judgmental attitudes
- In 2012, the Curriculum Revision Task Team of the University of Cape Town's medical school asked for evidence for the lack of LGBTI content in the curriculum

Methodology

- Online survey administered to all academics lecturing in UCT health sciences
- Content: 10 questions, hosted on Surveymonkey
- Distribution: invitations to participate through faculty listservs, departmental listservs, direct contact
- Run for 14 days, reminders emailed out on day 8 and 11
- Data analysis in Surveymonkey and Excel
- Approved by UCT's Human Research Ethics Committee (537/2012)

Survey content

- Questions adapted from Obedin-Maliver (2012)
- Lecturer info
  - Department
  - Position
  - Course
- Teaching info about gender identity and sexuality
  - Topic
  - Semester/ course
  - Format
  - Assessment

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***6. What do you cover in your teaching? (please select all that apply)**

- [ ] Definition and theories of sexual orientation
- [ ] Definitions and theories of sex and gender
- [ ] Sexual orientation versus gender identity
- [ ] Patriarchy, sexism
- [ ] Impact of sex and gender on morbidity and mortality
- [ ] Impact of sex and gender on delivery of health services
- [ ] Gender-related barriers to access to health care
- [ ] Domestic violence
- [ ] Sexual violence
- [ ] Intimate partner violence
- [ ] Homophobia, heterosexism
- [ ] Barriers to access to health care for LGBTI people
- [ ] Alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use for LGBTI people
- [ ] Safer sex for LGBTI people
- [ ] HIV in LGBTI people
- [ ] Sexually Transmitted Infections (not HIV) in LGBTI people
- [ ] Chronic disease risk for LGBTI populations
- [ ] Disorders of Sex Development (DSD)/ Intersex
- [ ] Transitioning (e.g. male-to-female, female-to-male)
- [ ] Sex reassignment surgery (SRS)/ Gender affirming treatment
- [ ] LGBTI adolescent health

Results

- Participants: 127 academics clicked on website, 93 provided information

Curriculum	***Total respondents***	***Respondents teaching LGBT health***
MBChB preclinical	29	5
MBChB clinical	32	5
Nursing & midwifery	5	-
Occupational therapy	12	-
Communication sciences and disorders	4	-
Physiotherapy	7	-
Audiology	4	-

Topics covered

Barriers to access to health care for LGBT people	4	PHC, Medicine, psychiatry, family medicine
Alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use for LGBT people	0	-
Safer sex for LGBT people	0	-
HIV in LGBT people	2	CLS †, Medicine
Sexually transmitted infections (not HIV) in LGBT people	2	CLS, Medicine
Chronic disease risk for LGBT populations	0	-
Disorders of sex development (DSD)/Intersex	3	HUB, Paediatrics
Transitioning (e.g. male-to-female, female-to-male)	6	HUB, PHC ‡, Family medicine, paediatrics, psychiatry
Sex reassignment surgery (SRS)/Gender affirming treatment	4	HUB, Paediatrics, Psychiatry
LGBT adolescent health	0	-
Mental health in LGBT people	0	-

No lecturer addressed or challenged students' attitudes towards non-heteronormative people

Curriculum cohesion

- Content scattered across the curriculum
- 1st year: Human Biology and "development of sex disorders" (intersex)
- Clinical years: gender-affirming treatment, transitioning – Psychiatry, paediatrics and family medicine

Format and assessment

- Mostly lectures, one optional special study module
- No practical teaching session, eg patient-provider interaction
- One third of lecturers did not assess content
- Other content assessed in multiple choice questions (SSM: report)
- No assessment of practical skills (eg. OSCE)

Discussion

- Good online survey participation by academics
  - Online surveys a cost-efficient tool to map curriculum inclusion of transgender health topics
  - Easy to administer
  - Easy to analyse
  - Provides ‘hard-data’ evidence for gaps in health professions education

Curriculum content

- The ‘biology’ of transgender health relatively well represented in curriculum
  - GSH Transgender Health Clinic part of academic teaching hospital
  - Dedicated individuals in psychiatry and endocrinology
- Other transgender health concerns under-represented
  - No mention of transgender identities beyond trans ‘biology’ topics
  - No ‘mainstreaming’ of transgender health concerns

Lack of student skills

- No acknowledgement of social context of transgender people's lives
  - No opportunity for students to learn about social determinants of health
  - No acknowledgement of the role of transphobia, homophobia, social exclusion and violence in trans people's lives
- No opportunity for students to challenge their own attitudes and beliefs
  - Direct patient skills not included
  - No opportunity to challenge students' potentially transphobic views

What SHOULD we teach about transgender health?

- Beyond the 'biology': social contexts, social determinants, social realities
- Include transgender identities in the relevant disciplines (eg. Infectious disease, mental health,…)
- Trans-specific health concerns (health promotion, gender-affirming treatment)
- Professional attitudes and obligations
  - Non-judgmental and
  - Non-discriminatory services

Conclusion

- Online surveys are an easy tool to provide evidence of curricular gaps
- Health profession students lack education about the social realities of transgender people's lives
- The emphasis needs to be on professionalism
- National surveys needed in order to develop national educational guidelines for the health professions

Thank you for your interest!

- Contact: alexandra.muller@uct.ac.za
- Feedback/ questions/ (constructive) criticism welcome!